

**Improving Conflict Prevention**  
**by Learning from Experience:**  
**Context, Issues, Approaches, and Findings**

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## CONTEXT: CONFLICT PREVENTION REACHES ADOLESCENCE

It has been seven years since Agenda for Peace called for "preventive diplomacy" toward conflicts such as in Yugoslavia. It is five years since the horrendous ethnic atrocities in Rwanda started the UN and some governments to do a bit of soul-searching about the conflict implications of their activities in developing countries. The human suffering, huge financial costs for humanitarian relief and peacekeeping, and other reasons that first led to the post-Cold war international interest in conflict prevention -- preventing violent conflicts before they start or containing initial outbreaks -- continue to provide a rationale for this fledgling policy movement, if it can be called that. Every half-year or so, another major crisis follows upon an earlier one, like East Timor followed after Kosovo, which erupted in the same year as the wars in the DRC and between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

To be sure, the UN, EU, and other major international actors are far from having established a regular policy of monitoring potential genocides or other violent conflicts, and acting early if it is feasible wherever they threaten to cause major human suffering. To the contrary, for those in the small but growing professional circles who are involved in conflict prevention as students, researchers or practitioners, the adoption and implementation of the imminently sensible idea of prevention seems maddeningly slow and perplexingly equivocal, especially as persuasive evidence of its value and do-ability accumulates. Setting aside the repeated failures to act in a robust way toward crises before they escalate, basic conceptual blindspots and muddled definitions persist, not only in the media but often at the highest policy levels:

- The tendency to ignore the vastly different practical implications of incipient stages of potentially violent political disputes, on the one hand, and violent stages of armed and militarized conflicts, on the other.
- Equating humanitarian and peacekeeping interventions on behalf of crisis mitigation with conflict or crisis prevention, which is aimed at obviating such remedial actions.
- The automatic assumption of older fields such as track-two conflict resolution, human rights, development, democracy-building, and so on that they, too, have been doing conflict prevention all along (an indication of its growing "popularity"), even though the ways those fields pursue their main goals may be as harmful as it is helpful in preventing

particular violent conflicts, depending on the conditions within the particular case.

In this connection, a curious note was the recent suggestion by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, apparently prompted by Kosovo and East Timor, that the international community should be prepared to support more and more such expensive and sometimes destructive crisis interventions, rather than try to spend less on alleviating crises and more in preventing them. It is possible there is a built-in compulsion or vested political interest within major international entities, despite all their qualms about multilateral cooperation, to pursue only the most costly and difficult military interventions, and bypass the more timely ones with fewer difficulties, controversy and cost? The continued hesitation to devote major attention and resources to conflict prevention may be due to such an ingrained habit, or to being pushed off the agenda by other worthy but competing issues, to a mental lag among many policymakers that has kept them from internalizing the meaning and value of prevention, to their lack of exposure to its payoffs in particular places, or to clearly contradictory vested interests that block the way. But does it make logical sense to attribute the current problem to lack of political will, when it is not clear they really been asked to act preventively, rather than reactively? It is not self-evident whether any nucleus exists inside the major bureaucratic systems that has been urging top decision makers to do anything very significant in potential crisis spots that are of peripheral importance. No clear loci exist so far for the responsibility in most of the leading organizations. Within those entities as in the public sphere of the international community as a whole, conflict prevention is still a matter of voluntary charity, not specific responsibility.

To clarify the conceptual matter, conflict prevention includes any structural or interactive means to keep intrastate or interstate tensions and disputes from escalating into significant violence and to strengthen the capabilities to resolve such disputes peacefully as well as alleviate the underlying problems that produce them, including forestalling the spread of active hostilities into new places. It comes into play both in places where conflicts have not occurred recently and where recent largely terminated conflicts could recur. Depending on how they are applied, it can include the particular methods and means of any policy sector, whether labelled prevention or not (e.g., sanctions, conditional aid, mediation, structural adjustment, democratic institution-building, etc.), and they might be carried out at the global, regional, national or local levels by any governmental or non-governmental actor.

In any case, the basic argument and message of conflict prevention still has not "stuck" in many critical policy quarters and levels, despite all the talk and activity in this field since the early 1990's. The quantity of policy doctrine, earmarked organizations and offices, specific decision procedures, public hearings, policy debates, appropriations, program regulations, field manuals, and other infrastructure of the kind that is commonplace for other post-Cold War policy concerns such as humanitarianism, terrorism, development, democracy, peacekeeping, and arms control still far outweighs those found so far in conflict prevention.

#### THE SHIFTING BURDEN OF PROOF

Indeed, in view of the rigorously calculated data the Carnegie Commission assembled to compare the costs of prevention to those of mid-conflict peace enforcement (e.g., Kosovo) or post-conflict intervention, one could argue that the inefficiencies in the failure to use available means and resources to more concertedly address conflict prevention is such a huge waste of public funds that it rises to the level of scandal. This squandering might be a ripe issue for opposition politicians who wish to challenge incumbent governments. The idea that prevention should be used instead of bloodshed and bombs might appeal to a sizeable portion of the public, were they to know about its cost-effectiveness.

Having noted all this, the significant incremental progress in the field should be recognized and built upon. Not only is conflict prevention now expressed frequently in the official statements and policy agendas of the UN, the EU, many regional bodies and governments. Not only have many intergovernmental and NGO international conferences been held on the subject. Not only are case-studies of success and failures and other research being produced. But a number of concrete efforts to prevent particular violent conflicts before they might start have been made in the Baltics, in the Balkans, in Eastern Europe, in Africa, in Latin America, and in Asia. Although the only office that is dedicated exclusively to conflict prevention is the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE, the UN, OSCE, EU, and many regional bodies (e.g., OAU) and subregional bodies (e.g., SADC) all have created rudimentary early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms and used them to a limited extent; several NGO's are forwarding early warning reports with response recommendations to decisionmaking bodies (e.g., CPN, FEWER); and the concepts and steps of early warning and conflict response are slowly being infused into regular programme operations through

practical analytical tools and training programmes by the European Commission, the UN and other bodies. There is also growing investigation of how the different policy sectors that are advocated on their own terms, such as economic development, environmental programs, arms control, human rights, humanitarian relief, democracy, and rule of law, can also be targetted more precisely to prevent violent conflicts.

Finally, in terms of the overall climate, it does seem that as each new crisis hits the headlines, there is less heard about how such conflicts are inevitable tragedies. Instead, more doubts and concerns seem to be publicly voiced that perhaps the calamity could have been avoided, and they ask what went wrong. More broadly, there are some signs that an implicit international norm may be slowly achieving articulation. Both UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and U.S. President Clinton publicly acknowledged in 1998 that their respective organizations could have acted earlier to prevent the Rwanda genocide in 1994. Potentially embarrassing Parliamentary official public inquiries have been made in France and Belgium into the roles that their governments may have played in neglecting or worsening that horrendous human calamity. Thus, there seems to be somewhat more acceptance, albeit dimly so far, of the principle that, if violent conflicts are not inevitable and can be prevented with reasonable effort, international actors are bound to act to do what is possible wherever situations may lead to massive violence.

In short, the field is making scant progress at the level of top official activity and public awareness, and somewhat more progress incrementally at the middle and field levels..

#### THE CURRENT PHASE

Significant further movement requires more political pressure from important constituencies and more energetic leadership at the top on the major bodies concerned (including the large NGO organizations in humanitarianism, human rights, and so on). Some of the relevant forces have not been heard from on this subject, such as legislatures who hold governments' purse strings. But another of the elements that may be limiting movement is the lack of solid knowledge and ready-to-use guidelines in the hands of decisionmakers about what approaches to preventing conflicts are effective, ineffective, or harmful, and under what conditions.

The reason we might say prevention has reached adolescence is that it is looked upon fondly for its promise and yet old enough to do some damage and to know better. The conventional wisdom in the last few years has been that "the problem is not early

warning but lack of political will to get action." Some of the factors behind the lack of political will were noted above. But there is also now a dawning realization that the problem in conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding is not merely getting action but implementing effective actions. In both potential- and post-conflict interventions as well, policymakers and field-level practitioners are beginning to be expected, not simply to launch initiatives and run programs and projects, but also to be accountable for getting more tangible results in achieving the ultimate goal of a sustainable peace, using the limited international resources that are available and being spent.

Certain recent events and trends have stimulated this pressure for more accountability and greater attention to evaluation of what is cost-effective:

- Increasing recognition that actions by international community are often part of the causation of conflict and can worsen the situation. We speak here not only of arms sales or harsh structural adjustment programs, but even about those actions that are deliberately aimed at conflict prevention or assumed to have such effects. It is becoming recognized, for example, that promoting majoritarian elections in highly divided societies can increase the risks of violent backlash by factions who see themselves losing.<sup>1</sup>
- Reversals of international post-conflict missions that were at one time celebrated as successes (e.g., Angola, Cambodia).
- Instances where it is now widely accepted that policy errors were made by taking certain ostensibly preventive or

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- <sup>1</sup> See Ben Reilly, "Voting is Good, Except When It Guarantees War," Washington Post, Sunday, October 17, 1999, Page B2. One might make a strong case that a certain pattern has become evident in the international responses to pre-massacre Burundi, 1993; Kosovo, 1992-98; and East Timor, 1999. The international community's implicit political championing of a minority's rights, such as through honoring unofficial referendums, and denouncing the human rights violations of their oppressors, thus demonizing the perpetrators, can become violence precipitation instead of violence prevention. It may simply put the vulnerable minority at greater risk by provoking the more powerful local faction to pre-empt the direction of political change militarily, while making no provision for protecting the weaker side from the forces of this violence.

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peacebuilding actions, such as conferring diplomatic recognition on seceding entities without guaranteeing their security (Croatia in 1991), and lack of application of existing aid conditionalities in Rwanda.

- Increasing questioning of whether humanitarian aid often has adverse effects on conflicts, such as in the maintaining of the Hutu Interhamwe militants in the refugee camps of eastern Zaire from 1994 to 1997, after their exodus from Rwanda.
- The findings of recent program evaluations contracted by funding agencies and foundations who are concerned whether their money is being well-spent. Their findings in some instances are revealing the limitations of frequently used and well-meaning initiatives such as NGO 'track two' diplomacy, human rights promotion, development aid, and other measures -- when they are not explicitly attuned to the most significant sources and manifestations of conflicts in specific settings.
- Scattered findings emerging from the empirical studies of both early warning and conflict prevention that been published over the past four years that suggest that international preventive interventions that is half-hearted may be worse than no action at all, since it is interpreted by determined repressors as a litmus test of what they can get away with.

These developments are beginning to shift the direction and tone of the prevention discussion from viewing the problem only as inaction to viewing it also as ineffective action. It is becoming more evident that it is not sufficient merely to press for just any preventive response ("Do something, quick!"). The UN and other international actors not only need to respond toward incipient conflict situations more promptly; they also must respond more intelligently. This means launching particular responses that are actually likely to be effective once implemented, and that are implementable. The recent policy errors have occurred in places with potential conflict where international actors are already present and carrying out programmes, not places where they have yet to arrive. Thus, international preventive failures has involved not only acts of omission, but acts of commission. The current challenge in conflict prevention is no longer simply whether action is taken, but which action is taken. What is now required is not simply political will but political wisdom.

Yet, further acceptance and exploration of conflict prevention need not await more definitive results from research. Sufficient, persuasive evidence already exists to get serious

about making more investment in preventive actions, procedures and organization. Prevention still does not receive the political and public priority it ought to have, and more vigorous and targetted advocacy of the value of prevention and to establishing the organizational and political apparatuses to do it is essential to moving the field forward. The point is rather that just more publicity and politicking alone does not necessarily lead to better policy. The popularization of awareness of conflicts and of the promise of conflict prevention may in fact worsen policy choices -- unless it is accompanied by a simultaneous emphasis on solid analysis of various policies' likely consequences. Analysis alone will not change the existing priorities but it can build up a basis for sound policy for the time when further advocacy gets more dramatic results. And presumably, a higher political priority would include more attention to analysis as well as action.

In the meantime, it is incumbent on the specialist community that so far has pursued the field to bring the existing evidence forward and to do further and more rigorous research on crucial practical questions of what works and what doesn't, why, and how do we find out these things. The methods of program evaluation and performance monitoring research that have been long used in other fields of international and domestic policy need to be harnessed to the improvement of conflict prevention policy.

#### ISSUES, APPROACHES AND FINDINGS

The remainder of this paper hopes to contribute to the international process of strengthening the effectiveness of current and future prevention efforts. It does this through addressing some of the main analytical issues arising when evaluating such efforts more systematically. It also treats briefly the questions of where to locate prevention evaluations and how to create international and local organizational capacities through which reliable evaluations can be brought to the attention of decisionmakers at all relevant levels so as to inform their choices and implementation responsibilities. The following sections:

- identify major analytical and organizational issues that arise when doing assessments of preventive efforts;
- describe differing approaches that recent studies have taken to these issues, and indicate some of their strengths and weaknesses;
- present sample findings from the different approaches.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The paper draws on materials that have focussed mainly on post-Cold War intra-state conflicts. However, these conflicts often



## ANALYTICAL ISSUES

Certain definitional and methodological issues need to be faced if evaluations are to be based rigorously on consistent rules of inquiry and reliable and relevant data. These issues arise at any level where the locus of responsibility for evaluation design and implementation may lie:

- What preventive activities should be the focus?
- What prevention impacts are to be measured?
- How do we know that our conclusions are valid?

### What Preventive Activities Should be the Focus?

To assess the impact of any form of collective action, including prevention activity, and to compare it with others in order to identify possible patterns, requires a precise notion of what is being assessed. This focus must have a certain unity, internal nature, and boundaries that distinguish it from other actions and from the environment in which it arises and on which it may impact. Defining an action as having a discrete character and a beginning and an end is somewhat artificial but useful for the purpose of studying how it behaves. And conflict prevention like other policy fields does organize and mobilize governmental and non-governmental actors and resources in various more or less deliberate and ordered ways so as to achieve explicit objectives, and these units or categories of activity can be usefully delineated as integral wholes for the purpose of evaluating their impacts.

But this does not settle yet the question of which units of such activities should be analyzed. Prevention activities can be divided up and categorized in several ways. What kinds of preventive "efforts," "action," "activities," or "intervention" - - to use general, inclusive terms for the moment -- are to be the focus for analysis? Although words like "policy," "programme," "project," "initiative" or policy "instrument" are frequently used, they carry no commonly accepted meanings, so they require a stipulated definition. There is no accepted unit of preventive action that should be analyzed. In the age of Internet learning, these terms need to be generic if they are to be used for cross-cultural as well as cross-case lesson-drawing.

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involve various extra-territorial forces and actors that internationalize intra-state wars, such as seen dramatically in the recent conflict in the DRC.

The basic choices in picking a unit for analysis have to do with a) the vertical level in the global system -- global, regional, national or local -- at which they operate and would be expected to have impacts; and b) the horizontal breadth at any of these levels, meaning whether one or more types of interventions are examined at any one level.

Evaluation can and has looked at conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities carried out at the global, regional, national and local levels. Concrete examples of preventive actions at these respective levels would be an international criminal court, a regional embargo on arms traffic or trade, a national debate, and a rural village development project. Various types of practitioners work at these different levels, such as policy planners, country-level desk officers, country-level program and project administrators and NGO "chiefs of party," and rural community project implementers. So they will naturally tend to take an interest in evaluations that focus on the units and results at their particular levels.

At each of these levels, the scope for a study can include one type of distinct programme, project, or initiative (whatever term is used), such as those in the examples, or it could span across several types applied at that level. It would thus vary in terms of the "reach" it encompasses -- functionally across policy sectors, geographically across a given territory, and demographically across a society and population. Within each such type at any level, there may be several kinds of sub-activities that are carried out and can be evaluated. The possibilities can be visualized below.

Table II.  
Possible Units of Preventive Activity to Evaluate

Level	Distinct types of intervention			
	1	2	3	4
Global	✓ _____	_____	_____	_____
Regional	✓ _____	_____	_____	_____
National	✓ _____	_____	_____	_____
Local	✓ _____	_____	_____	_____

#### Internal and External Sources of Prevention

Within the national and local levels, it is important to include in the analysis indigenous factors, i.e., factors such as the presence or absence of a democratic tradition that are not directly affected by external forces. We should not assume that

the question of prevention effectiveness encompasses only the activities of external actors who come to the scene from outside a given conflict arena. The outbreak of potential violent conflicts may be determined as much by the localized proclivities for either violence or peaceful resolution of tensions or by what internal actors do or not do, as it is by whether various external actors do something and whether what they do is effective.<sup>3</sup> A familiar example would be the peaceful breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1992. Although in retrospect we know some of the domestic political dynamics that explain why the divorce was peaceful (e.g., the insulated negotiations between Vaclav Klaus and Vladimir Meciar), in 1990 and 1991, that situation was on some lists of the potentially most explosive ethnic conflicts in Central Europe. Thus, it is crucial to define the fundamental research problem as not merely "What external preventive efforts are effective?" but rather: "What internal and external factors prevent conflicts?"<sup>4</sup> A particular situation of potential

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<sup>3</sup>Contrary to a common impression, many social tensions and political disputes that could escalate -- in fact, probably the vast preponderance (cf. Laitin and Ferejohn, 199 ) -- are managed internally so as to keep them from becoming violent. There is probably no general penchant for violence. To the contrary, the usual bias is likely for stability and peace; violent conflicts are the exception to the rule.

<sup>4</sup> Reframing the question this way may be confusing at first. The prevailing semantics in doing diagnosis in order to come up with policy prescriptions looks first for various "causes" of a conflict. These are usually assumed to be local in origin. ("Early warnings" are simply the specific expressions and indicators of various causes of conflicts.) It then looks at what external actions might be recommended. This often presumes that preventive remedies are external. But instead of viewing the local situation as mainly the source of the problem and the external actions as mainly the source of the solution, a more accurate perspective treats both internal and external factors as possibly part of the problem and part of the solution, depending on the individual case. Just as the search for the causes of violent conflicts must be pursued internationally as well as locally, so must the causes of conflict prevention be looked for locally as well as internationally.

This more open perspective not only yields the most comprehensive and balanced diagnosis of a conflict situation, and of prescriptions of what might be done about it, from an analytical point of view. Knowing about the internal capacity or incapacity for prevention has the practical value of helping to gauge the urgency of specific situations and the extent that external action may even be necessary at all. That is, it provides a

conflict holds within it a certain set of external and internal conditions that will vary in terms of their tendency toward violent or peaceful relations. A complete catalogue of the determinants of the likely trajectory of a particular vulnerable situation could sort them in terms of whether they are causes or remedies and whether they are external (exogenous) or internal (endogenous). The following table gives some recent examples.<sup>5</sup>

**Table I.**

**Sources of the Determinants  
Of Whether Potentially Violent Situations Escalate into Violence  
or Follow a Peaceful Course  
(Examples from Yugoslavia, 1990-1992)**

	<b>Possible Causes of Violence</b>	<b>Possible Remedies for Violence</b>
<b>External factors</b>	EU recognition of Croatian independence, early 1992.	EU offer of economic aid if inter-republican disputes are resolved peacefully, 1991.
<b>Internal factors</b>	Croatian and Serbian Republics leaders' public tendencies to incite ethnic groups' fears and nationalist ambitions, 1990-92.	Macedonian electorate's rejection of nationalist parties' appeals in Parliamentary elections, late 1991.

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vulnerability assessment or risk assessment. It also can identify positive trends and actors that external and internal actors might choose to reinforce, i.e., a needs or opportunity assessment. The field could benefit from a documented list of "early opportunities" as much as from authoritative early warnings.

<sup>5</sup>Because regional factors and actors that are close to a conflict arena may impinge significantly on the conflict parties, we can consider them part of the internal situation, rather than as external.

In examining a given situation, what is needed is an assessment of all the key causal variables or dimensions -- both internal and external -- that are known from rigorous research on many cases to tell whether the situation is likely to take one course or another. In any given situation, depending on the particular values of these several variables, i.e., their magnitude or character in each situation, the trajectory would likely incline toward more conflict or more peace, or something in between (i.e., conflict escalation, suppression, postponement or resolution).

### Commonly Used Units of Analysis

Global and Regional Level. A few studies have tried to evaluate the effects on preventing violent conflicts within states or between states of organizations, treaties, norms, and other influences that operate at the supra-national global or regional levels in relation mainly to states. For example, one preventive strategy that has attracted considerable interest of late, perhaps because of the activities of the OSCE and the policies of enlargement of NATO and the EU, is the offer of prospective membership in multilateral organizations in order to encourage states to behave properly toward their own citizens and toward other states.

Obvious individual examples can be cited of this policy's apparent success, such as the integration of former enemies within the EU and NATO (Schneider and Weitzman, 1996; 15). An analysis of the Visegrad experiment, the Central European Initiative, the Council of Baltic Sea States, and Black Sea Economic Cooperation, argues that the various efforts by Western European states to foster such post-Cold War subregional economic and security organizations among Eastern European states has provided a useful provisional influence in the region that supplements the incentive provided by their expectations of eventually joining Europe itself (Bonvicini, 1996; 9).

The scattered studies that look at a large number of cases to measure overall trends appear to corroborate the notion that participation in multilateral organizations can elicit more peaceful behavior by states. To illustrate, the many states that were integrated into postal unions from 1816 and 1990, were more likely than other states to be constrained from belligerent actions. Indeed, these economic organizations were a more significant pacifying force than the security alliances of the same period (Schneider and Krause, 1993; 14-15). From 1970 to 1993, the Soviet Union and Russia were increasingly induced to comply with family reintegration and Jewish emigration norms and agreements through its participation in the CSCE conferences that

developed these human rights norms (Gubin, 1999). Similar effects on states' behavior were found in the cases of the offer of EU membership to Central and Eastern Europe, the pursuit by the People's Republic of China of membership in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and World Trade Organization (WTO), and the effort to join the UN and other organizations by the Republic of China (ROC) (Shambaugh 1996: 21,31).

National Level: Instruments. The most common unit of analysis employed in the prevention literature is interventions applied at the national level. These are looked at both individually and in the sets of interventions that may comprise a multi-faceted, multilateral effort in a country.

To the extensive literature on mediation, negotiations, and sanctions are being added studies that address the utility of less-known tools that are increasingly being used for prevention. The list of generic instruments potentially usable could include such diverse ones as: preventive deployment, cross-lines local development projects, political conditionality in aid, social safety nets, democracy-institution building, judicial war crimes tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, official negotiations, non-official "track-two" dialogues, elections, election observation/assistance, national conferences or civil society forums, humanitarian relief, human rights observers, problem-solving workshops, police reform, special envoys, and many others in the potential prevention "toolbox" (e.g., Cortright, 1997; Esman, forthcoming, 1998; Lund, et. al, 1997, 1998; Lund, 1997; Ross, 1999; Rothman, forthcoming; Vayrinen, 1997; Vayrinen, et. al. 1999, 178-218; Reilly, et. al. 1998). These studies draw evidence from one or more actual applications of a type of intervention.

*Illustration: Political Conditionality.* This donor instrument makes aid or trade available depending on the recipient's record with respect to human rights, democratization, or other objectives of "good governance." By deterring or stopping human rights violations, reducing corruption, increasing transparency in governmental processes, and reducing military spending, for example, this instrument might reduce various institutional and policy sources of potential violence. Specifically, donors offer to provide aid or trade or threaten to decrease or eliminate aid them as positive or negative inducements to pressure centralized or authoritarian governments to refrain from human rights abuses and to relax their grip on national politics.

Considerable research supports the view that under certain conditions, political conditionality has had significant effects

in eliciting desired changes in recipient governments, as shown by a number of individual instances when conditions were applied and governments changed their policies (e.g., Ball, 1999 ; DeFeyter). In Malawi and Kenya in the early 1990's, for example, heavy-handed treatment of diplomats and their own citizens lead to threatened aid cutoffs and other international pressures, and these induced Presidents Hastings Banda and Daniel Arap-Moi, respectively, to announce new elections and take other steps to open up participation in their governments (Ball, 1993). Particular actions against significant violations of norms can also have a wider demonstration effect by discouraging similar actions elsewhere (Nelson and Eglinton, 2). But while some efforts have succeeded, others have had mixed results or ultimately failed. The push for elections in Kenya in 1992, for example, may have enabled its longstanding president to become further entrenched (Ball, Stokke). Thus, how common positive outcomes are is disputed.

Conditioning aid can have unintended negative effects, especially a fixed, standard policy that cuts aid whenever a criterion is violated. Cuts can backfire if recalcitrant regimes muster sufficient domestic opposition to expel donors, as occurred in Indonesia and Zaire (Stokke, 52). This not only breaks off contact and narrows the opportunities for dialogue and influence with a regime, but might encourage it to increase its objectionable practices. External pressure for political reform that is too strong can diminish the credibility and legitimacy of new democratic procedures (Nelson, 1993) or displace indigenous initiatives to promote democracy (Stokke). Cuts may punish civilians for the behavior of political and military leaders. And because political liberalization is a long process with many possible setbacks, repeatedly raising or lowering aid in response to political ups and downs makes it difficult to administer an effective ongoing program of economic development.

But no instrument or other intervention is going to be either simply effective or ineffective. A valuable aspect of this instrument research is its identification of the generic contexts and conditions in which success or failure is likely to obtain. For example, political conditionality is likely to be effective to the extent that certain conditions are present, such as the following (Waller, Stokke, Skogly, DeFeyter, Nelson, Baldwin, 312, 317):

- solid support for the measures from domestic constituencies.
- significant political support for the changes within the affected regime, so it is divided or ambivalent and external pressure can help to tip the balance;

- the focus of the donor's action is a clearly definable behavior like blatant anti-democratic moves, such as military coups or aborted or fraudulent elections, a crackdown on civic associations or opposition parties. It is easier to reverse specific time-bound acts and behaviors that are clear violations of certain norms, such as overthrow of an elected government, compared to achieving larger, vaguer, more complex, and ongoing institutional changes such as democratization.
- clear specification of the actions that are expected from the recipient country;
- concerted action by multiple donors, suggesting that multilateral institutions that are heavily influenced by major donors, such as the World Bank, may be better vehicles than
- few trade, investment, or security interests in the affected country compete with the need to pressure the government;
- donors also provide aid to help finance the reforms.
- substitutes for the aid cannot be obtained from other sources.

National Level: Multi-Instrument Missions . Another growing genre involves case-studies of one or more places when governmental or non-governmental actors undertook several kinds of initiatives in intra-state conflicts at early-stages that were perceived to be vulnerable to violence, such as have arisen recently over issues of secession and autonomy, control of governments, democratization, and central government policies (e.g. Congo-Brazzaville after its election violent demonstrations in 1993). Most of these focus on recent failures in prevention, or "missed opportunities," such as Rwanda (e.g. Adelman and Suhrke, 1996, Suhrke, 1998), Bosnia (Woodward, 1995), and Burundi (Lund, Rubin, and Hara, 1998). But some look at apparently successful prevention, or "seized opportunities" (Hurlburt, Lund, Mazarr, and Zartman and Vogeli in Jentleson, ed., forthcoming in 1999; Lund in Alker, Gurr, and Rupesinghe, forthcoming in 2000). A consensus seems to be that successful international preventive interventions have usually involved early and vigorous attention to several leading facets or "fronts" of a conflict. For example, this means not only fostering elite political dialogue to achieve power-sharing, but also deterrence or other methods of securing public order, as well as supporting significant inter-communal reconciliation.

*Illustration: International Prevention in Macedonia, 1992-1998*  
 From 1992 to 1998, Macedonia witnessed one of the most robust, multi-faceted and multi-actored instances of concerted international preventive action in a situation that was perceived



to be threatened by instability but not yet in crisis.<sup>6</sup> Several different kinds of initiatives, including preventive deployment, official negotiations, informal political dialogues, and civil society projects were initiated with regard to the four main external and internal threats - Serbia, Macedonia-Greece relations, internal ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian relations, and Kosovo -- that were posed to the new country's democratic integrity. These efforts are widely assumed to demonstrate a "successful" case.

A close examination of the range of military, diplomatic, and NGO instruments that was brought into play by the UN, OSCE, the EU, the U.S. government and several major NGO's over this period, and reasonable inferences about their likely impacts based on their theories of practice, produces a generally positive but also multi-layered and sobering conclusion, in which specific strong points as well as deficits were noted.

Specifically, military and diplomatic instruments were largely successful in terms of dampening down periodic incidents of low-level street violence and rising public tensions, as well as in fostering political negotiations and settlements among most of the antagonists. Vis-à-vis the top political and governmental leaders and a possible military incursions from the north, for example, the UNPREDEP preventive military deployment helped to create a secure environment for national politics to be carried on between the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities. UNPREDEP and the OSCE have both been unusually involved in the domestic and level local politics of a more or less willing sovereign state, even if often informally and behind the scenes. The temptation to undertake political violence to achieve group aims was displaced by legitimate channels for political struggle, including non-violent street demonstrations. In addition, however, internal demographic, historical, political and economic factors, such as moderate leaders, provided some basis on which the international initiatives could build. Only in Kosovo, where the conflicting parties were not seriously engaged by the international community, did prevention fail.

At the same time, the preventive diplomacy inside Macedonia and Kosovo also seems to have had an unintended King Midas-like effect. By so explicitly acknowledging the Albanian ethnic groups' grievances, third parties raised their political expectations and increased the incentives to continue their nationalist political causes through ethnic mobilization. But little was done to create the economic conditions and broader political environment that could undercut or circumvent the tendencies of elites to ethnicize all domestic and foreign

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<sup>6</sup> This summary is derived from Lund, 1999 forthcoming.

policy issues.

The volumes containing several of these case studies seek to generalize from them in order to draw useful policy conclusions and to pose hypotheses for further testing (Miall, 1992; Munuera, 1994; Van Evera, 1995; Lund in Alker, et.al., forthcoming in 2000; Walleensteen, 1997; Bloomfield, 1997). Based on both these multi-case research projects and individual cases, Table III synthesizes many of the dimensions or variables that appear fairly consistently to be critical determinants of violent or peaceful outcomes of emerging national conflicts - including internal as well as external factors.<sup>7</sup>

**Table III**  
**Key Variables**  
**that Determine the Trajectory of Potentially Violent National**  
**Conflicts**

*Political tensions and issues will be addressed peacefully rather than escalate into significant violence, depending on whether:*

Internal Factors

- Past relations between the politically significant groups have been peaceful in the recent past, rather than violent.
- Regional actors adjacent or close to the immediate arena of conflict such as neighboring states, domestic actors, or refugee communities remain neutral to an emerging conflict or actively promote its peaceful resolution, rather than supporting one side or another politically or militarily.
- Moderate leaders from each of the contending communities are in positions of authority and in regular contact as they carry out the public's business, and they show some evidence of

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<sup>7</sup> The findings are stated in terms of positive factors that contribute to violent conflict prevention. We focus on intra-state situations which have not seen violent conflict in the immediate past, as against immediate post-conflict situations. (For details, see Lund, 1996; Wallensteen, 1998; Jentleson, 1999; Varyrinen, et.al., 1999; Rubin, forthcoming in 2000)

progress.

#### External Factors

- External action is taken before significant use of violence occurs rather than following it.
- Early action is robust in terms of the positive or negative inducements exerted on the potentially conflicting parties, rather than half-hearted and equivocal.
- Early action is concerted and consistent among the major external actors, rather than ambiguous or contradictory.
- Early action addresses the fears and insecurities of the dominant parties to a conflict, as well as promoting the interests of the weaker parties.
- The action deters or contains the possible sources that can trigger immediate violence, as well as addressing the political disputes at hand and other medium term or long term sources of conflict.
- Support and protection is provided to the established central political processes and governmental institutions, as long as they incorporate and engage the leaders of the main contending constituencies in rough proportion to their distribution in the population in give-and-take politicking over public policy and constitutional issues, rather than supporting exclusionary governmental structures or constructing alternative opposition institutions.
- The dispersed diasporas of the parties to a conflict that may reside in major third party countries are not highly mobilized behind their respective countrymen's cause, or they support peaceful means of resolution, rather than lobbying their current governments in partisan ways or aiding and abetting coercive or violent ways to pursue it.

Multiple, structured cases. As revealed by this medium-sized list, comparing several cases using a common framework of plausible factors as guiding hypotheses avoids the misleading practice of selectively generalizing what are supposed policy "lessons" from what may be merely idiosyncratic features of a

single case. Single cases also generate "too many" explanatory factors, whereas comparison can boil those down to which of them appear consistently.<sup>8</sup>

An especially policy-relevant multi-case method is the close systematic comparison of similar pairs or sets. That is, very similar settings are chosen for comparison where potential conflicts escalated into violence in one or more cases, but did not escalate in the other case(s) (e.g., a forthcoming comparison of cross-border kin-group conflicts in Hungary-Slovakia; Macedonia, and Kosovo in Lund, 1996, forthcoming in Alker, et. al., 2000). These similar pairs with differing conflict outcomes allow the researcher to eliminate the commonalities across the cases as the causes of whatever the conflict outcome was. Instead, the method exposes the differences between the cases that were associated with the different outcomes and thus may explain them.

Local Level. Despite the proliferation of grass-roots projects of various kinds undertaken often by NGO's, and wide reliance on them by governments, few rigorous studies of NGO methods for preventing local conflicts have been done so far (Heinrich, 1997). But interest in evaluating the

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<sup>8</sup> The more cases the better, but not just any case-study format will do. Both the instrument evaluations and whole country case-studies use the method of case-study analysis known as "structured, focussed comparison," developed by Alexander George, Robert Yin, Martha Derthick, and others. Experience-based comparisons of several cases using a common framework are superior to the more typical approach to "lesson-learning" that is common in policy circles. The latter tend to look at one case and offer broader generalizations for imagined future cases, even though they do not take explicit account of the associated conditions in the one case that help explain its particular outcome. When lessons are thus drawn following no methodical rules of evidence, they are likely to be biased by the needs of the analyst's agency or individual point of view, rather than informed by a wider examination of pertinent variables that arises from the application of a policy and the context in which it was applied. Because it provides little basis for judging *why* and *where* some option "X" is likely to be effective, this informal approach can lead to mistaken inferences, serious policy errors, and sometimes great harm. At the same time, the qualitative, non-statistical nature of this comparative method lends itself to accounting for individual variations among cases, and normally speaks a non-statistical language that is conducive for communicating findings to policymakers

effectiveness of NGO and other projects is rising among the foundations and development donors who are faced with choosing where to put their limited resources (Ross, 1996; Conradi, 1998).

What preventive impacts should be measured in judging whether a preventive intervention is effective?

Relation to Conflict and Peace. The diplomatic and other interactive instruments that are explicitly aimed at conflict prevention can judge their performance in terms of criteria such as whether incipient violence is contained or dispute settlements are reached. But many other non-interactive programs and projects currently in the toolbox that may have actual or potential conflict prevention implications (e.g., infrastructure development projects, democracy-building programs) are not however specifically intended or designed to affect the forces that shape the level of conflict or peace in a country. Few efforts now being carried out in developing countries have a mandate that specifically mentions conflict prevention or peace building. Most are aimed at other goals such as civil society-building poverty reduction, democratization, conventional economic development, rule of law, good governance, economic reform, or human rights. They have other primary goals which may or may not address the most significant factors in a country that are driving it toward a violent conflict, such as militias in training. At best, they may be secondarily justified as doing that indirectly, but not directly and explicitly. They may not even be targetted at strengthening the specific local capacities that are most needed for peaceful resolution of differences, such as by sustaining a political dialogue between a powerful repressive government and a fledgling opposition. In fact, in some circumstances, pursuit of these goals may have an opposite destabilizing effect. Assisting a country to hold an election, for example, though it may be regarded as advancing democracy, has often contributed by its timing to provoking major violent conflicts or a coup d'etat (e.g., in Congo Brazzaville, Cambodia, Burundi).

Consequently, setting appropriate performance criteria for evaluating these policies' impacts with regard to various aspects of conflict and peace must take into account that there may be only a remote connection -- by deliberate design -- between what they are officially intended to do (e.g., monitor and report human rights violations), and any evident effects on conflict and peace. Such "indirect" preventive measures can be evaluated with regard to whether the explicit sectoral goals that they set for themselves have been achieved, but without further analysis, it is harder to measure whether there is a meaningful causal

connection to known sources and dynamics of conflict and peace. Thus, the challenge of assessing impacts on peace or conflict thus is like that faced by those who had to apply environmental impact or gender-sensitivity criteria to policy sectors with other concerns. Table IV lists some of these cross-cutting criteria.

Although the definition of conflict prevention includes capacity-building as well as violence prevention, most of the case-studies measure success by whether a conflict erupts into violence or not. But prevention effectiveness or ineffectiveness needs to be judged in relation to several indirect and structural as well as direct and interactive antecedents of violence as well as desired conditions for peacebuilding. But some country-level retrospective case-studies look at a number of types of possible impacts that might flow from the several instruments that may be found operating. These impacts include, for example, whether mutually suspicious ethnic groups are being equally served and incorporated together in development and social service programs. These broader gauged assessments that can produce multi-levelled conclusions. The Macedonia study illustrates the application of an evaluative approach that differentiates between various kinds of possible impacts on conflict at different levels (Lund, in Jentelson, forthcoming, 1999).

## Table IV

### Illustrative Criteria for Evaluating Peace and Conflict Impacts, (based on major fronts in which national conflicts are waged)

Did the application(s) of the intervention:

#### Security

- deter the outbreak or perpetration of specific possibly imminent acts of violence?
- keep actual low-level eruptions of occasional violence from escalating?
- protect vulnerable groups from likely attacks of violence?
- ease the sense of threat, fear and anxieties expressed by various groups toward one another?

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#### Political Relations and Policy Decisionmaking

- engage opposed top-level political actors in new contacts and communications?
- enter new substantive ideas and options into debate and dialogue that are seriously considered or adopted as compromise solutions of outstanding disputes?
- help the parties leaders reach agreements on specific disputes and public policy issues?
- change the perceptions and attitudes that the leaderships groups held toward one another?
- soften the stridency and tone of public debate and statements?

#### Institutions and Mechanisms

- create new informal venues and channels through which disputes and issues can be addressed by the protagonists?
- set up or strengthen formal institutions and procedures that encompass broad segments of the population in democratic forms of decision-making?
- help build autonomous spheres of social power that are active outside the official organizations of both government and opposition political parties and organizations (civil society)?

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#### Distribution of Resources and Participation

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- stimulate active, salient efforts to address structural disparities among the main groups at odds, by achieving more equitable distributions among them of basic material and economic needs, such as income, educational opportunities, housing, health services?.

• upgrade the skills and understanding of those significant

Scale of the Effort. Another crucial impact measurement issue is how to judge the value of single initiatives in a country with respect to the large political, military and public opinion forces that largely govern the main course of a whole national conflict. Unless a project or even a national level programme entails the infusion of huge amounts of resources, launches overwhelming coercive force, or mobilizes a powerful expression of popular sentiment in a particular national conflict arena, it is unlikely it alone or even several initiatives will discernibly change the direction of an incipient national conflict or a country's capacities for peace. To paraphrase a comment made at a recent conference by an NGO staffer whose organization operates in an African country that is currently somewhat unstable:

"We evaluated all our projects and they were doing well. But the country was steadily deteriorating."

For example, aid programs to support political parties and legal reform in Russia were found to have little discernible effect because of the unfavorable political climate for introducing new independent political parties and because of the lack of resources available for new party activities such as training (GAO, 1997). To make a substantial difference, especially in a large country, such programs and projects either have to operate widely, and thus their costs would be high, or their coverage of the population and the needs they address are likely to be limited.

Yet, just because particular interventions seem to have no discernible effect on a larger political environment, that does not mean the projects are necessarily unproductive. It is important to identify specific appropriate criteria for impact on conflicts and peace that are proportional to a particular initiative's potential for influence, and by which they can be appropriately judged -- short of the unrealistic standard of having obvious direct and dramatic effects on the course of a country's conflict. The challenge is finding appropriate criteria that lie in between simply operational project or program objectives, on the one hand, and possibly unrealistic measures of impact on the larger dynamics and course of a conflict, on the other. Such criteria should be neither so demanding, in view of the scope and resources required for an effect, that no projects would be found to be adequate (e.g., Did the initial fighting stop? Was a dispute settlement reached?). Nor should the standard be set so modestly that all activities will be found to have some useful effects, thus making the evaluation meaningless (e.g., How many school children were involved in the program?). Defining proportional criteria



requires identifying a given initiative's expected scope of influence on phenomena related directly or indirectly to conflict sources and manifestations, in view of its resource levels, the particular level at which it operates, and the geographic scope of its coverage.

But this does not eliminate the problem of evaluating the larger impacts. The problem remains of judging the aggregated impact on a whole conflict of whatever battery of initiatives in a country setting is operating. Because no one initiative or actor alone is likely to be able to alter the course of conflicts, it is generally recognized that what is needed is combinations and mutually supportive interactions of many actors' efforts that contribute to an overall prevention process -- thus, the rising mantra of the need for multi-actor "coordination" and "coherence" that adds up to an overall conflict prevention strategy for a given setting.

Matching Method. The task is more complicated when several interventions have been applied more or less in tandem. Here it may be difficult to distinguish the impacts on a conflict from among several interventions that may have been applied (as well as from other non-intervention factors). The "inside-out" option would be to simply apply the same tests above to the several interventions involved, one by one. The "outside-in" approach or matching method, however, starts from the opposite direction: not did X have impacts, but what did situation X require. To avoid the problem of the separate treatments being successful but the patient dying, this macro-evaluation method involves comparing the sets of intervention responses applied to a conflict to the various kinds of causes and offsetting peace capabilities in a given conflict.

This approach starts by identifying and listing the particular configuration of socio-economic, institutional, cultural-attitudinal, and immediate behavioral sources that are present in a given potential conflict situation. To formulate its list, it draws from the many studies of these causes done in various cases to develop a checklist and then applies the list to see which causes in particular are most evident in the particular case at hand. This should give some indication of the extent that each of these differing kinds of causal factors was evident as a conflict situation evolved - e.g., when underlying socio-economic disparities were present but conflict was latent because little political activity was organized around the socio-economic disparities, when social groups began to be conscious of certain grievances and organized around them and articulated them, when outward forms of hostility began to surface, and so on.

The method then turns to the intervention side and asks: "What was done by various actors toward this conflict, and in particular, which of these various causes were addressed? Which were not?" To draw such conclusions, it catalogues the various governmental or non-governmental interventions applied over the same period of time as the conflict causes were identified. By looking at each of the interventions respective conflict/peace strategies (see above), it seeks to determine whether these particular interventions had some plausible causal connection to the main causes at work in that case. The findings of such a matching procedure could be of major evaluative and policy significance if it were found in a case that certain causes of a conflict were being addressed but others in that context were simply being ignored.

The matching method was applied in a preliminary way in a recent case-study:

- With respect to Burundi, 1988 to 1996, especially following the coup and massacre of October, 1993, one study found some of the same types of instruments were in place as in Macedonia, including political dialogue through a UN special envoy, a small OAU observer force, and many international and domestic NGO reconciliation projects, including EU development assistance. However, while these instruments dealt with some of the structural and attitudinal sources of the tensions, the conflict prevention effort was skewed primarily to diplomatic persuasion. Despite the presence of an OAU military observer mission, there was no effective means to suppress or contain the several immediate sources of low-level violence that were steadily escalating the conflict both before and after the Buyoya coup in July 1996. Violence was allowed to beget more violence. The perpetrators of violence on both sides were represented by the Tutsi dominated army, urban ethnic enclaves, and new insurgencies forming in neighboring Zaire and Tanzania.

In short, in this case, despite a large number of initiatives by several actors, some crucial elements were missing, thus explaining the subsequent escalation of the conflict.

## How do we know that our conclusions are valid?

Although one has been able to gather data on indicators of various impacts to be measured, one cannot be confident that identified impacts in pre-empting violent conflict or enhancing peaceful trends can be attributed to the influence of the preventive interventions that are in focus. How can you tell whether preventive efforts have an impact? Other factors may have produced the result. So how can one demonstrate a causal link between the intervention(s) and various discovered impacts in reducing the manifestations or potential for conflict?

The most common approach to concluding causation is sequential analysis. This examines the unfolding of events over the course of a conflict, noting when certain preventive actions were taken and whether gross changes in the conflict and peace indicators of interest chronologically followed those interventions. Where the features of an intervention (e.g., denunciation of human rights violations) is seen to precede a positive change (e.g., reduced violations), the latter is attributed to the former. But the mere existence of a temporal sequence does not constitute a cause-effect relation. Many other factors may have been responsible, such as events arising at an earlier point in time or an objective or subjective influence coming from an entirely different causal chain (e.g., a leader's conversion to a new outlook on the situation, or a government's temporary distraction from committing violations). Or the result may have come, not from the nature of a particular intervention itself, but from the particular people who were involved in carrying it out in this or that instance, and the particular style with which they did their work. This method is vulnerable to the fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc (after this, therefore because of this).

Association does not prove causation, and all explanation is in varying degrees inferential rather than directly observed. Nevertheless, there are several ways that the inevitable gap between assumed cause and assumed effect can be narrowed, and confidence in a causal connection can be increased. This confidence can be boosted by applying one or more tests:

1. *Is there a causal logic that connects the intervention to the result?* One way to increase the chances there has been a connection between a given intervention and a peace or conflict condition or event is to look closely

at the intervention to see whether its specific goals and workings could even be expected to have the effect identified. Conflict interventions such as observer missions, conditioned aid, or political dialogues differ considerably in terms of the underlying anti-conflict or pro-peace "strategy of action" that they embody, what Marc Ross calls their "theories of practice". Each of these operative theories constitutes a certain combination of goals, resources and other elements that are intended to work together. The most important elements are an intervention's:

- Primary (immediate) and secondary (long-term) objectives
- Targeted problem (its point of entry into the situation, such as the local actors' attitudes or behavior, institutions, practices, or conditions that a tool aims to affect, and at different levels of society)
- Mode of influence used on the target to achieve the objectives: "soft" and "hard" approaches, carrots, sticks, and other inducements
- International and local implementer(s) that use the resources in performing tasks to reach the objectives (the "delivery system").
- Sponsoring organization that initiates and/or funds the intervention.

Thus, the analyst can first see whether such a theory of intervention even existed in the plans of the sponsors and it was actually carried out, and second, compare the strategy inherent in an intervention with the impact it was believed to have, in order to see if the intervention had at least the logical potential to realize those results.

1. *Do the conflict protagonists believe there was an impact?* As Miall points out, one element that is missing from simply observing an intervention-impact sequence is whether the key actors in the conflict situation interpreted the supposed cause as a reason for the impact. Thus, one's inference can be bolstered if the local actors who were the agents of the impact interpreted the meaning of the intervention as a reason for doing certain things that led to the impact. This requires, if practically possible, asking these agents or close observers of the agents whether they felt influenced in the expected ways.

2. *Is the causal link plausible in view of other known knowledge?* The assumed chain of events can be examined to see if it is consistent with existing social science or other generally accepted knowledge of relevant phenomena.
3. *Were the impacts realized where the intervention was not applied?* If possible, comparisons can be made between similar situations, within the same conflict arena or outside it, but where the intervention was not applied. Although an actual experiment cannot usually be performed in real life and obviously toward past events, the methods of quasi-experimental research can be used to identify the near-equivalents of "control groups" to see if differing impacts or no impacts were achieved where there were differing or no interventions.

## PROCESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

### Who Should Conduct Evaluations?

Each of the previous analytical and methodological issues arises in some way regardless of who carries out an evaluation and where, although the approach taken to these issues may differ depending on the locus of responsibility. Thus, a further crucial issue being increasingly raised is often stated as whether conflict prevention interventions should be evaluated in a "top-down" manner or in a "bottom-up, participatory" manner.

The former connotes outside analysts making the crucial design choices and drawing the study's conclusions: defining the units of analysis, gathering data from outside or inside the conflict situation to identify the sources of conflict, measuring the results of interventions, and interpreting the findings to draw cause-effect conclusions. Most (but not all) of the case-studies referred to above were done in this way by "outsiders."

The argument for outside evaluation points to the value of having some objective distance from the immediate disputes and emotions that are in the air so as to be able to be objective and to consider a wide range of causal factors besides what may be perceived by insiders. Another strength is being better able to avoid arriving at a host of local factors of greatly varying importance by applying cross-case empirical theory to pinpoint key causal factors and intervention-impact relationships, perhaps by testing hypotheses drawn from several cases. A third may be greater access to a greater range of interventions. The latter two

are not necessarily inherent limitations of a local perspective, however, but functions of current capacity. One major downside of the outsider approach is lacking sufficient contextual knowledge to ascertain how local actors in a country setting interpreted the conditions and these meanings led to certain consequences. It also fails to involve the local "stakeholders."

The participatory approach means that local actors from the conflict situation who are more or less involved in, or in a position to closely observe, a conflict situation undertake each of the above research tasks. A strength for evaluation that aspires to influence policy and the course of a conflict is that those local actors who are ultimately expected to respond to the conclusions of a study by implementing changes in local practices to reduce the conflict are much more likely to do so with respect to an evaluation whose design and implementation they have been involved in and they have ownership of. A commonly heard but less persuasive argument is that "only" local actors can "really" understand the situation, since this by definition provides no public test of validity and is often a disguised argument for a particular interpretation.

Of course, one need not choose between the extreme of all external design and implementation or all internal design and implementation. Some possibilities lying in between include

- external design and internal interpretation, or vice-versa
- joint external-internal design and interpretation, using an agreed-on framework.

Is there organizational capacity for applying past lessons to inform subsequent policy or practice?

Obviously, a critical ultimate question is whether the findings that result from systematic intervention evaluations will be transmitted to the appropriate policymakers at various levels who have the ability to do something about the lessons, or at least consider the pro's and con's of taking various actions. (Unless research conclusions are incorporated into actual organizational practice in some degree and form, we cannot truly call these lessons "learned"!) The question is not whether existing analyses lead to particular responses. In democracies many other political and other factors legitimately shape any given policy decisions. The more serious question for effective, accountable democracies is whether the existing institutional and political capacities of any of the

governments, inter-governmental organizations, NGO's, or other actors permit them even to make use of available evaluation studies in order to guide in some sense what they decide to do or not do.

Early Warning/Opportunity Capacity. This first part of this question refers to whether these entities have ways to comprehensively and systematically gather and interpret information about potential emerging conflicts, such as early warning data. As noted in the introduction, some progress has been made by the UN, the EU, the OSCE, the OAU, as well as by the governments of the U.S.. The multitude of early warning and conflict analysis projects are being developed in NGO's and academic institutes already comprises a small industry of early warning specialists who variously employ quantitative and qualitative data and look at multiple and individual cases (for a survey of approaches to early warning, see the very useful but somewhat misleadingly titled book, Preventive Measures, 1999, edited by John Davies).

Early Response Capacity. More to the point, this capacity issue refers also to whether these entities have any means to systematically analyze not only early warning indicators but also a range of possible options they might use to respond to these warnings, including reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the options as interventions, as well as their political pro's and con's. It also includes the political and bureaucratic motivation to activate such procedures in order to make reasonably appropriate choices and to actually carry them out.

A few descriptive surveys have been done of the existing institutional capacities for early warning and preventive action of certain major potential conflict preventing actors, such as the OSCE and the European Union (e.g., Clingendael, 1999, Saferworld, , International Alert ). The emphasis in some of these studies is on an organization's current procedures and units devoted to gathering and interpreting conflict information and early warning data. Some also describe the formal decisionmaking process through which preventive responses are supposed to be considered and to describing some of the major instruments that may be available to the actors. A few also give examples of how such instruments have been applied in this or that conflict situation (See e.g., Hopmann, 1999 on the OSCE and the office of the High Commissioner for National Minorities). But few in-depth empirical studies have been done of the actual processes whereby particular entities interpreted emerging conflict situations, defined

their interests in relation to it, considered one or more options as ways to respond, and decided to take action of some sort or did not.<sup>9</sup> Graduate students seeking thesis topics, take note!

#### CONCLUSION: TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

Conflict prevention is now beginning to be taken more seriously but it is operating without systematic policy guidelines and had made some unfortunate errors. It is essential that more rigorous evaluative research be done based on the recent experience, using a range of impact criteria that are appropriate to the level at which particular preventive interventions operate and the appropriate scale of impacts they can be expected to accomplish. The available research to date is finding that, notwithstanding that each case or application is unique in its situational details, suggestive patterns are revealed. Certain identifiable internal and external ingredients seem essential for success that have to do with local favorable and unfavorable conditions, when third parties get involved, to what extent, through what policy techniques. And differing types of individual interventions are effective under certain conditions. The reasons a country or inter-state relationship will follow non-violent or violent modes of handling political disputes are not totally unfathomable or random, but arise from identifiable elements.

These retrospective lessons can be codified and translated into practical guidelines for decisionmakers at every relevant level, and used prospectively to diagnose potential conflict situations and plan coherent multi-faceted strategies (e.g., FEWER, 1999). But more energy needs to be invested in convening multilateral venues that make possible the doing of joint diagnostic

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the closest to this type of in-depth study is Susan Woodward's book on the Yugoslavian wars of secession, Balkan Tragedy, 199 , which includes considerable analysis of the actions taken by the UN, the EU and other third parties. One section of Lund, in Jentelson, ed., (forthcoming 2000), used interviews to examine whether early warning or other considerations influenced U.S. decisionmakers to get involved in Macedonia. Other studies in the Jentelson volume also deal with that question. Such points are touched on also in the Lund, et. al. case-study of Burundi, 1998.



and prescriptive exercises, using common frameworks and vocabularies and informed by existing knowledge.

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